

I) IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Presently amended) A method of operating a reward ~~points~~ system in conjunction with a computer network, the computer network interconnected to at least one issuing bank computer operated by an issuing bank that issues a ~~card~~token to a user, said token comprising a user payment account ID for ~~in association with a user payment account at the issuing bank computer and at least one acquiring bank computer operated by an acquiring bank that collects payment from the user payment account at the issuing bank computer and pays the merchant when the user presents the card to the merchant in association with that is used to pay for a purchase transactions,~~ the method comprising ~~the steps of:~~
 - a. providing a reward ~~point~~-account database in a central reward server computer that interoperates with the computer network, the reward ~~point~~-account database storing (i) a first plurality of individual user reward ~~point~~-accounts for transactions between the user and a first merchant and (ii) a second user reward account for transactions between the user and a second merchant in association with each of a plurality of independently operating merchants, both the first user reward account and the second user reward account being identified with the user payment account ID;
 - b. a user executing a first~~purchase~~ transaction with the~~a first transacting merchant selected from said plurality of independently operating merchants by presenting the card~~token to the first ~~transacting~~

merchant for payment of at least part of the first transaction;

- ~~a. a transacting merchant computer, operating in association with the transacting merchant, transmitting via the computer network a request to an acquiring bank computer to obtain approval of said purchase transaction from an issuing bank computer, said request comprising a user payment account ID as obtained from the card; and~~
- c. a the first transacting merchant computer operated by the first merchant transmitting an first instruction to the central reward server computer to add a first set of rewards points to a the first user reward point account using an identification of the first merchant and the in the reward point account database, the user reward point account being associated with the transacting merchant and the user payment account ID;
- d. the user executing a second transaction with the second merchant by presenting the token to the second merchant for payment of at least part of the second transaction; and
- e. a second merchant computer operated by the second merchant transmitting a second instruction to the central reward server computer to add a second set of rewards to the second user reward account using an identification of the second merchant and the user payment account ID.

2. (Presently amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of redeeming rewards points from the user reward point account by the steps of

the user executing a reward redemption~~purchase~~ transaction with a redeeming merchant;
the user utilizing rewards~~_points~~ from at least one ~~of the~~ first user reward point~~-accounts~~ associated with the user for the purchase ~~reward redemption~~ transaction;
a redeeming merchant computer ~~associated with~~ operated by the redeeming merchant transmitting an redemption instruction to the central reward server computer to reduce the first user reward point account ~~associated with the user by~~ the amount of rewards~~_points~~~~_used~~ in the transaction.

3. (Presently amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of
establishing a user reward point~~-exchange~~ account on the central reward server computer;
selecting rewards~~_points~~ from the first user reward account and the second user reward account ~~each of a plurality of user reward point accounts associated with different independently operating merchants for~~ exchange into the user reward point~~-exchange~~ account; and
the central reward server computer exchanging the selected rewards~~_points~~ into the user reward point~~-exchange~~ account.
4. (Presently amended) The method of claim 3 further comprising the step of redeeming ~~aggregated-exchanged~~ rewards~~_points~~ from the user reward point~~-exchange~~ account by the steps of
the user executing an exchange reward redemption~~purchase~~-transaction with a redeeming merchant;

the user utilizing ~~aggregated~~ exchanged rewards
points from the user reward point exchange account
for the ~~purchase~~ exchange reward redemption
transaction;
the user reward point exchange account being
reduced by the number of ~~aggregated~~ exchange
rewards points utilized for the ~~purchase~~ exchange
reward redemption transaction.

5. (Presently amended) The method of claim 3 comprising the further steps of:

establishing a cluster of independently operating merchants, each of which have user reward ~~point~~ accounts established with the reward ~~point~~ account database in the central reward server computer;

allowing ~~aggregation~~ exchange of rewards points from each of the independently operating merchants in the cluster into the user reward point exchange account; and

disallowing ~~aggregation~~ exchange of rewards points from a merchant not a member of the cluster.

6. (Presently amended) The method of claim 5 comprising the further step of allowing for redemption of ~~exchanged~~ aggregated rewards points only with redeeming merchants that are members of the cluster.

7-20 (Cancelled).

21. (Presently amended) The method of claim 2 wherein the user executes the reward redemption ~~purchase~~ transaction completely with rewards points from the first user reward point account.

22. (Presently amended) The method of claim 2 wherein the user executes the reward redemption purchase-transaction partially with rewards ~~points~~-from the first user reward point-account and partially with other consideration.

23. (Presently amended) A reward ~~points~~-system comprising:

~~at least one~~an issuing bank computer, interoperable with a computer network and operated by an issuing bank, that issues a ~~card~~token to a user ~~in association with~~, said token comprising a user payment account ID for a user payment account that is used to pay for purchase transactions~~at the issuing bank computer;~~

~~at least one~~acquiring bank computer interoperable with the computer network and operated by an acquiring bank that collects payment from the issuing bank on behalf of a merchant and pays the merchant when the user presents the card to the merchant in association with a purchase transaction;

~~at least a first one~~transacting merchant computer interoperable with the computer network and operated by a first transacting merchant, ~~said transacting merchant being one of a plurality of independently operating merchants;~~

a second merchant computer interoperable with the computer network and operated by a second merchant;

a central reward server computer interoperable with the computer network and comprising a reward ~~point~~-account database for storing comprising (i) a first plurality of individual user reward point accounts in association with for storing rewards for transactions between the user and the first merchant and (ii) a second user reward account for storing rewards for transactions between the user and the second merchant, both the first user reward account and the second user reward account

~~being identified with the user payment account ID each of the plurality of independently operating merchants,~~
~~_____ wherein the first transacting merchant computer is adapted to~~

~~transmit via the computer network a request to the acquiring bank computer to obtain from an issuing bank computer approval of a purchase transaction being executed with a user who has presented a card for payment of at least part of the transaction, said request comprising a user payment account ID as obtained from the card; and~~

~~_____ transmit via the computer network, as part of a first transaction executed with the user during which the user presents the token to the first merchant for payment of at least part of the first transaction, a first instruction to the central reward server computer to add a first set of rewards points to the first user reward point account using an identification of the first merchant and the user payment account ID in the reward point account database, the user reward point account being associated with the transacting merchant and the user payment account ID; and~~

~~_____ wherein the second transacting merchant computer is adapted to transmit via the computer network, as part of a second transaction executed with the user during which the user presents the token to the second merchant for payment of at least part of the second transaction, a second instruction to the central reward server computer to add a second set of rewards to the second user reward account using an identification of the second merchant and the user payment account ID.~~

24. (Presently amended) The system of claim 23 wherein the central reward server computer (A) further comprises a user

reward ~~point~~-exchange account associated with a user and (B) is adapted to (i) enable-receive instructions on the selection of rewards points from the first user reward account and the second user reward account~~each of a plurality of user reward point accounts associated with different independently operating merchants~~ for exchange into the user reward ~~point~~-exchange account, and (ii) exchange the selected rewards ~~points~~ into the user reward ~~point~~-exchange account.